

**"THE ETERNAL" A BETTER TRANSLATION THAN "THE LORD"?**

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On television last evening, a Christian interviewer of six Jews was rebuked by the only woman for asking "What does the Lord require of you Reform Jews today?" Her response included, by implication, that "the Eternal" requires of us that we stop saying "the Lord," "a masculine term."....Got me to thinking, & remembering....

1 As you know, the interviewer was quoting Mic.6.8, which has "the LORD" (caps to signal the tetragrammaton, the Hebrew letters YHWH) not only in Christian versions & translations (e.g., NRSV, NIV, CEV) but also in Jewish (e.g., TANAKH [JPS/85]). YHWH, it seems, is now requiring that Reform Jews cut that out, stop calling God "the LORD." (Indeed, the Jews on the program showed hesitance even to use the word "God," though probably not from consciousness that it also is masculine. In polite company these days, it is said, the use of any name or title for deity has "a chilling effect" on the conversation--especially now that, among liberal Jews & liberal Christians, language for God has become a gender-feminist, PC minefield.)

2 In Ex.3, the deity (EL generic, YHWH specific to the Israelites) self-names to Moses as EHYEH-ASHER-EHYEH ("I am what I am, and I will be what I will be. And when you tell your people of this experience [the burning-bush vision+audition] tell them it is the same YHVH they know about") (THE TORAH: A MODERN COMMENTARY [Union of American Hebrew Congregations/81], 406: "you cannot really know Him until you experience Him in your own life")....In verse 12, God says "I will be with you": "I will be" is EHYEH, futuric. Reminds me of the last sentence in Albert Schweitzer's QUEST FOR THE HISTORICAL JESUS: In walking with him, "we shall find out who he is." (As is LORD in Eng., so in Heb. are both YHWH & EHYEH: four-letter words.)....Rigorists say that the divine names are hitching posts; metaphorists, that they are guideposts; I, both.

3 Both names--YHWH (? "I am") & EHYEH ("I will be")--have a time reference, so "the Eternal" is appropriate as time-conscious & also time-transcendent. If we transpose to the other pole of the space-time continuum, God is "the Everywhere" (as in the Am. Indian "the everywhere Spirit"). "Omnipresent" is the traditional abstraction covering both, & has the further value of stating the "with you" (Ex.3.12).

But "the Eternal" is an **abstraction** missing (1) God's action as command-giver, demand-maker (which "LORD" or "Lord" includes) & (2) God's gender [masculine], which signals that the Commander-Demander is personal, so the pressure to obey is other than, in another dimension from, nature's pressures. Linguists say that Hebrew is inferior to Greek in that the former is low, & the latter high, in abstract expressions. "The Eternal" feels more Greek than Hebrew, yet the proposal is to use it to represent not a Greek but a Hebrew word....Some propose translating YHWH "God" (e.g., Ps.23 in THE NEW CENTURY HYMNAL [p.633] begins "God is my shepherd"), as though the text were EL (God generic, the blandest expression for the divine) instead of YHWH (the specific communal-individual name of the Psalmist's deity). "God" is even less adequate a translation than "the Eternal."

The second missing element, viz. gender, was not a factor in former uses of "the Eternal." Very recently, gender feminism has added its thumb to the scale tipping toward its use to render YHWH.

4 When translators despair of finding an adequate equivalent, they may resort to transliteration. Of the 26 translations adduced in THE OLD TESTAMENT BOOKS OF POETRY FROM 26 TRANSLATIONS (Zondervan/73), in Ps.23.1 all have "the LORD" or "the Lord" except the Jerusalem Bible, which transliterates as "Yahweh" (though strict transliteration would have only YHWH). Jews, who pronounce the tetragrammaton "Adonai," object to what amounts to a Christian guess at the vowels of YHWH. Besides, neither Jews nor Christians can feel any depth or warmth in this mock-up word, or in its predecessor "Jehovah" (which tried to preserve the Heb. consonants while adding, as Jews do, the vowels of "Adonai," the metonym meaning "My Lord"--a practice already in use by the time of the Septuagint [2nd c.BC/BCE]).

NB: For thousands of years the Jews have understood the "lord" idea to be the essence of YHWH, their deity's personal name. Reform Judaism's recent decision to dump this essence, in conformity with gender-feminism, is a betrayal approaching blasphemy.

5 Confirming the lord essence of YHWH is the fact that those 2nd c.BC/BCE Jews who did the LXX (Septuagint) used, to represent YHWH, the regular Gk. word for lord, viz. κύριος *kurios*. Further, the earliest translation of the NT, viz. into Latin, regularly translates YHWH as *dominus*, "Lord." Ronald Knox's translation of the Latin (Vulgate) has "the Lord," not "the LORD" (as would be true were he to have been translating from the Hebrew).

6 Jas. **Moffatt**'s one-person translation of the Bible (Harper & Bros./22, rev.'34) is, to my knowledge, the 1st Christian use of "the Eternal" to render YHWH. E.g., Ps.23.1 is "The Eternal shepherds me...." He tries to be both "exact and idiomatic" (vii). In Ex.3, Knox has "the Eternal" 7 times, & thus translates the name EHYEH: "'I-will-be-what-I-will-be'...'I-will-be' has sent you to them." But in the NT, Knox always uses "Lord" for κύριος when the reference is to Jesus, & also in the OT when YHWH lies behind the Gk. (LXX, from which the NT writers usu. quote: the early Christian Bible was not Heb.OT/Gk.NT but Gk. in both Testaments).

His reasoning? P.xxi: "Were this version intended for students of the original, there would be no hesitation whatever in printing 'Yahweh.' But almost at the last moment I have decided with some reluctance to follow the practice of the French scholars and of Matthew Arnold (though not exactly for his reasons), who translate this name by 'the Eternal,' except in an enigmatic title like 'the Lord of hosts'." He admits that this "miss[es] something of what it meant for the Hebrew nation"; but also "a certain [lyrical] gain...." A strong loss, a weak gain. NB: Gender is not in his reasoning....

....but it is in the United Church of Christ national office reasoning: The Pilgrim Press' extensive stylesheet (guide for authors) does not even list "Lord" (though it has "Lord of hosts"). Warning to authors: DON'T USE "LORD"!

The death-of-Lord disease is the latest form of the "death of God" movement.

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